



The Secret of *Success Criteria*

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THE ISSUE

Recently in Ontario with the release of the Growing Success document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) there has been a policy-setting trend towards student-based assessment and the use of high-quality descriptive feedback with students to improve student learning. One of the seven fundamental principles outlined in the document (p.6) is to “provide ongoing descriptive feedback that is clear, specific, meaningful and timely to support improved learning and achievement.”

Feedback provides students with a description of their learning. The purpose of providing feedback is to reduce the gap between a student's current level of knowledge and skills and the learning goals. Descriptive feedback helps students learn by providing them with precise information about what they are doing well, what needs improvement and what specific steps they can take to improve. According to Davies (2007, p.2), descriptive feedback enables the learner to adjust what he or she is doing in order to improve.

Growing Success, p.34

What must teachers do in order to provide students with high quality descriptive feedback related directly to the achievement of the Ontario Curriculum expectations as well as the learning skills and work habits outlined in *Growing Success*? Some fundamental shifts in thinking and practise are necessary for high quality descriptive feedback to emerge as an assessment strategy in all Ontario classrooms and schools.

SHIFT ONE

High quality descriptive feedback is directly related to well-developed success criteria. Success criteria are only powerful when derived from the unpacking of each curriculum expectation or cluster of expectations and related directly to what the expectation(s) looks like in student work. Using success criteria will improve student achievement to a greater extent when the derivation of the criteria is shared and co-constructed between teachers and students. When teachers and students become able to clearly articulate what the expectation(s) looks like in student work, then high quality descriptive feedback becomes possible.

Before identifying success criteria with students, teachers spend time with colleagues deconstructing curriculum expectations. They build foundational knowledge and a shared understanding prior to sharing and co-constructing success criteria for levels 3 and 4 with students.

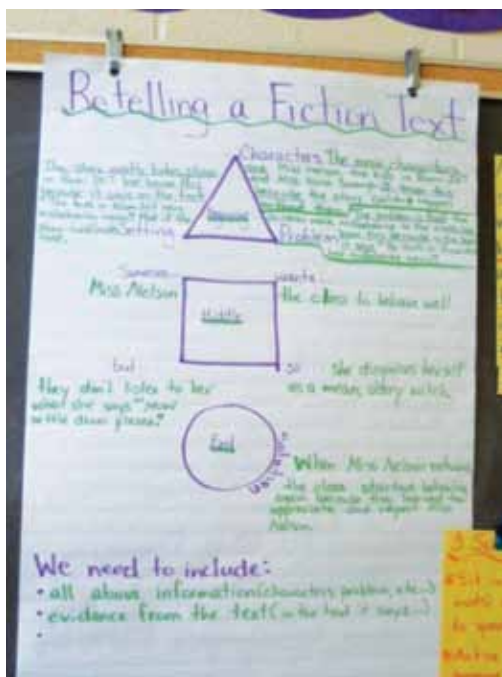
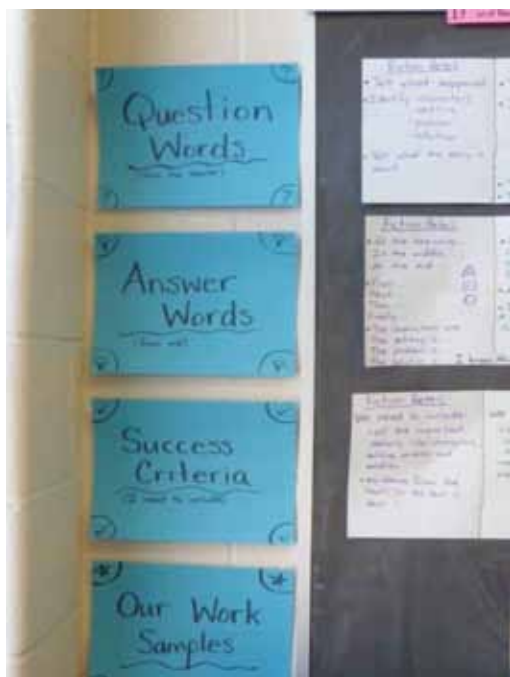
	Demonstrating Understanding	Extending Understanding
Meta-Tags or Question Words “Looks like”	What happened...? Five W’s (character, setting, plot, problem, solution) Retell the story/events/info Beginning, middle and end Five Important facts/ Tell about... Explain	Make a connection... How is this story like...? What does this remind you of...? What questions do you have now...? Other texts... other stories, the world/Extend understanding Own experiences or knowledge/ wonder
Student Starters or Answer Words “Sounds like”	The “big idea” is... I know this because... In the beginning, middle, In the story... end First, next, then Five very important points Go Map/Go Chart- Graphic organizers	This reminds me of... Another book... I remember ... This makes me think... This makes me wonder... Now I am wondering... Now I think...
Success Criteria	Includes main idea Includes important details Proper sequence Connection/ Inference	Relevant connection Connects to the main/big idea of the text Shows empathy Connects to the real world

Example of success criteria derived by teachers in Grade 1 at a professional learning community meeting for Reading for Meaning expectations (or O.E.1: 1.4-1.6)

Once teachers are clear on the success criteria that they will use to verify student learning then students are brought into the process of co-creating success criteria for the class. For example, if teachers are working on demonstrating understanding of text through retell, then students have to clearly understand what is expected in a fiction and factual retell. Students moderate samples of student work to identify what *makes it good* and are part of identifying and posting the success criteria. In turn, the posted criteria anchor chart serves as an assessment and learning tool to be referenced along the learning pathway. It is imperative that the success criteria are determined closer to the beginning of each learning pathway rather than the end. Success criteria must be visible and available to students as a reference for their learning progress and targeting goals

for improvement. Criteria are revisited and refined as teachers and students gain greater understanding of what constitutes high quality work. Success criteria do not have to be perfect at the start!

Once the success criteria are accurately identified and constructed with students, the provision of high quality feedback becomes much easier. When teachers know clearly what they are looking for and students understand what they are trying to achieve, descriptive feedback becomes a process of elimination, with students and teachers determining what is present and missing in each student’s work based on the success criteria identified. Learning targets become logical as students actively seek to meet the missing success criteria. All student work is honoured for what it includes and placed logically on a continuum of mastering the required skills and strategies.

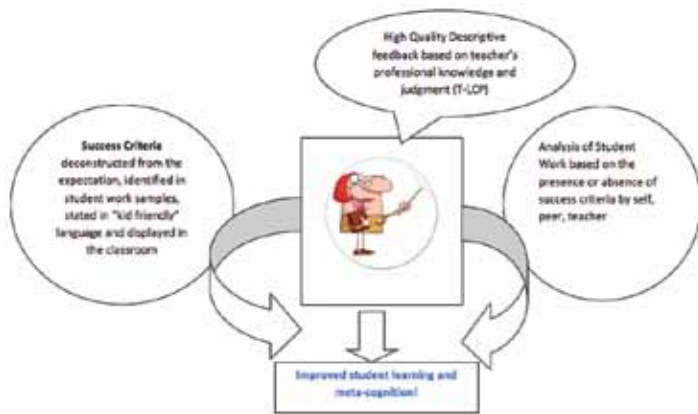


These two examples show success criteria that are being constructed with students in Grade 3.

Note: teachers had to provide direct instruction to show what success looks like by using a GO MAP for a fiction retell and five important points for non-fiction.

SHIFT TWO

The quality of descriptive feedback becomes directly related to professional knowledge in the particular subject area. The extent to which teachers clearly understand the expectations for reading, writing, critical thinking or the mathematical and scientific processes, for example, will directly affect the quality of descriptive feedback available to students.



For example, Teacher A considers retell as simply retelling the important points in a text sequentially. Teacher B believes that a retell includes relating facts/evidence in the text to support an inference of the author's big idea and formulating a connection to the big idea in the text to extend understanding. Teacher B is going to give much richer descriptive feedback. The success criteria formulated by Teacher B and her class will allow for much richer understanding of the text and deeper thinking in contrast to students in Teacher A's class who will only learn how to recount.

What does this mean for educators? We cannot all be experts in every single subject! However, as we continue to work in professional learning communities, collaboratively planning our teaching-learning critical pathways, we learn with and on behalf of each other. We build in time to deconstruct curriculum expectations, compare them across various grade levels in a continuum of learning and develop success criteria for the area of focus prior to beginning the teaching cycle. By actively examining samples of student work, redefining and clarifying success criteria with students along the way, teachers will continue to expand their understandings of the important areas of learning to address with students.

It is critically important to take advantage of the collective wisdom of the group. Identify those teachers who are experts or masters of a particular subject area. Find opportunities to learn with these colleagues through professional learning, visiting their classrooms and/or co-teaching.

SHIFT THREE

Assessment becomes student-based when teachers develop students' own ability to assess their own work and that of other students. It is imperative for success in the 21st century that students become reflective and meta-cognitive thinkers who are able to independently determine next steps for their own learning and work. Teachers find ways to organize student thinking and learning so that each individual learner is able to see their strengths and clearly identify next steps. Students need to be able to assess their work in terms of where it is and be given opportunity to improve, rather than just hitting or missing the evaluation mark then moving on to something new.



This is a Thinking Matrix used in Grade 8 to organize student thinking and writing. Note that the success criteria are on sticky notes that can be moved around or changed. In addition, the metacognition expectations (4.1-42) are posted around the matrix as students become familiar with reflective thinking processes.

SHIFT FOUR

Descriptive feedback is purposefully designed by teachers to offer the right amount of support to each student based on personal need. The chart on the next page shows how assessment *for* and *as* learning (Growing Success, p.31) can be custom fit for each student by changing the instructional prompts and adjusting the level of support to match student needs.

When descriptive feedback becomes a focus for professional learning, a new deliberate process piece is added into the teaching and learning cycle that entails developing an archive of powerful prompts and strategies for students. Teachers articulate the dynamic prompts, powerful teaching and learning strategies, successful tasks and rich culminating activities that really help students to reach their potential in each learning pathway. As teachers develop these archives for each learning pathway, they internalize and articulate professional knowledge and expertise as descriptive feedback improves.

Description	Types of descriptive feedback Least structured - structured	When?	Powerful prompts that make thinking visible Adapted from LNS, Ontario Ministry of Education, SIM Session II, Fall 2010
Formative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be oral or written Purpose is to give specific and precise information for students to improve Student should be able to go back to the same piece of work to address and apply feedback. Feedback needs to be personal and objective, according to student needs in their work. If there are several students who would benefit from the same feedback, it is effective to group them and provide them with a guided lesson. 	Providing a Reminder: There is an assumption that the student knows what to do and just needs a reminder to get back on track.	The student knows what to do but simply may have forgotten what to do.	Don't forget to include relevant and specific evidence from the text and not just supporting statements in your answer.
	Providing Scaffolding Directive: Provide precise information and explain specifically what the student needs to do.	Students somewhat know what to do during the task but need more structure and support to move forward.	We talked about how to think about the beginning of the story and then the end of the story to try to help us figure out the big idea in the text. Can you use your schema and the clues in the text to figure out what the story is really all about? Can you think about what the author was trying to teach us, tell us or convince us about? Why do you think they wrote this? Can you show me your thinking - how do you know that is the big idea? What is the evidence in the text? Once you know what the big idea is think about what it means to you. What do you think now or have questions about that you didn't before you read this?
	Questioning: Ask a direct question to have students think about what they need to do. Complete the sentence: Give the student a thought that he/she needs to complete.	Help students who are having difficulty accessing the task.	Why do you think the author wrote this text? What is the big idea? What does it mean to you? The big idea of the story is... I think the author is trying to.... I know this because... A question I have is... A connection I have is... An inference I have is...
	Provide Examples: Give students two or three choices from which they can pick one that speaks to them. They then continue to expand on the choice/example.	Help students who are having difficulty accessing the task.	Let's think about the big idea that we identified in today's read aloud when we read the book, "Psst..". We decided that the author was trying to tell us that zoos are not a great place for animals. The big idea was that animals belong in the wild and need to be free. We knew this because the animals all asked the girl for something to build the getaway car and escape from the zoo. It made us question whether zoos are really good places for animals and maybe we don't want to visit them anymore. Please think about the story you have just read in the same way and record your thinking.

SHIFT FIVE

The way that assessment of learning or evaluation of student work occurs is impacted by using success criteria with students and by the provision of more effective descriptive feedback. Students who are engaged in a process of understanding and constructing success criteria with their teachers; who are given the chance to moderate and assess their own and others' work; who are provided with the opportunity to self determine and set their own learning targets approach evaluation as an opportunity to gauge their learning on a clear continuum rather than an unconnected singular event.

The criteria and method of evaluation is shared with students at the beginning of the learning cycle. Students understand that feedback from teachers and peers will be given in verbal or written form and that they should be actively using it along with the success criteria to continually improve their work. Students are asked regularly to collate feedback, and determine and revise learning targets. When formal evaluation takes place students see themselves as part of the assessment process with their self-chosen, most proficient and most recent pieces of work being evaluated.

CONCLUSION

It is vitally important that the learning loop be closed for Ontario students. By recognizing the relationship between understanding the curriculum expectations; communicating what is expected to students; constructing success criteria with students in language that they understand and connecting it to their work; creating meaningful and rich tasks; and using student-based assessment in the classroom that allows all student work to be honoured and viable learning targets to be established by peers and self, Ontario students will forge successfully into the 21st century.

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